

PEARL of AFRICA

PUTTING OUR MONUMENTS ON WIKI

SPECIAL TRAVEL SECTION

By Linda Neruba

Unknown to many Ugandans, September was a busy month for lovers of monuments in Uganda. They raced against the calendar to put more images and information about our monuments and heritage sites on the world map. This was under the badge of Wiki Loves Monuments (WLM), which was happening in Uganda for the first time.

WLM is an annual international photographic contest that started in 2010 by Wikimedia, centered on cultural heritage sites and monuments.

The idea is for anyone to capture a relevant photograph (of course following a criteria) of a monument or a heritage site, upload it on Wikimedia and then stand a chance to win. While at it, they are contributing to content on Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia. WLM is said to be the biggest photo competition in the world.

This year, Uganda had a chance to put many of its heritage sites and monuments on the international map by taking part in the WLM challenge.

WLM Uganda 2017 was organised by the Wikimedia Uganda user group, with Geoffrey Kateregga as the lead organiser.

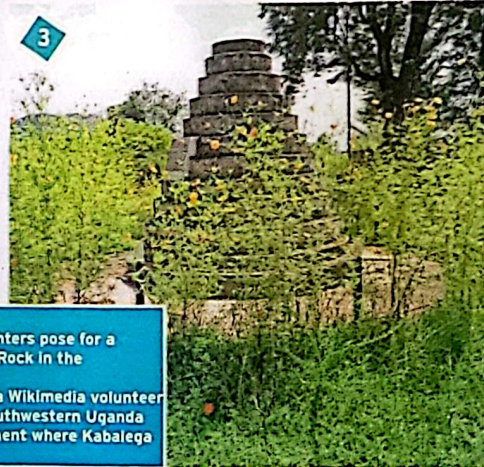
"There are lots of cultural heritage sites and monuments in Uganda, yet they are not documented on Wikipedia. From over 500 sites provided by the department of museums and monuments, there were only two articles on Wikipedia by the start of Wiki Loves Monuments, Uganda 2017," Kateregga said.

THE GOAL

Kateregga, who has volunteered with Wikipedia projects since 2013, says the goal of Wiki Loves Monuments is to encourage people to take pictures and put them under a free licence so that others access them on the internet.

The Uganda challenge for this year was launched on September 7 at the Uganda National Museum in Kampala. With guidance from the organisers, participants were introduced to the competition and taken through the process of how to upload pictures onto the designated site.

The group then took to



1. A team of photo hunters pose for a picture with Tororo Rock in the background
2. A picture taken by a Wikimedia volunteer at Kisizi Falls in Southwestern Uganda
3. Mparo 4 the monument where Kabalega met Emin Pasha

the streets and outskirts of central Kampala with their cameras in a hunt for cultural sites, historical monuments, buildings and landscapes. Others went afield, with visits to upcountry monuments and sites.

HITCHES

While the photo hunt for cultural heritage was adventurous, it did not go without a few hitches. Steven Baluku, who took a road trip to western Uganda, says access to the sites was not easy, especially when it came

to getting the right directions.

"Residents were either not aware of their location or its existence. Also, some monuments did not have guides, making it almost impossible to get information about the sites. The same went for sites, like the mystery tree in Kiboga, which the local community claimed is of cultural importance, but had no factual details. This presents a task to educators, researchers and institutions responsible for cultural heritage," Baluku said.

Patrick Jumanywal, a site

attendant at Emin Pasha's Fort Wadelai in Pakwach district, said despite the challenges with access and technical know-how required to upload the pictures online, it was an eye-opening experience which exposed him to other heritage sites shared on one of WLM Uganda social networks.

It was also noted that custodians of some sites were protective and questioned the team's motives. That is why it was important that the team partnered with the department of museums and

monuments as a national institution responsible for safeguarding cultural sites and monuments in Uganda.

The department shared a list of gazetted national heritage sites and monuments to guide the participants and also gave authorisation for access.

IMPORTANCE

Projects such as WLMs provide a platform for awareness and public engagement with their cultural heritage. It is also an opportunity for professional

MONUMENTS AND HERITAGE SITES

Monuments include statues, buildings or other structures erected to commemorate a notable person or event.

They serve as memorials for future generations and are of historical importance.

In Uganda, they include sites such as Namugongo Martyrs Shrine, statues like the Independence Monument, as well as the Commonwealth War Memorial cemeteries in different towns.

Heritage sites are also historic markers of cultural, religious and social history, which are mostly preserved by communities due to their cultural importance.

In Uganda, they include sites linked to ancient dynasties and kingdoms, as well as natural phenomena like waterfalls or giant trees with cultural significance.

photographers and enthusiasts to give back to their community by sharing images of Uganda's rich heritage with the rest of the world.

According to Kateregga, entries from WLM Uganda are entered into the international competition, where quality counts.

The higher the quality of the photo, the more likely it will be used to illustrate an article on Wikipedia.

The images collected and uploaded will help build content on Wikipedia, hence improving online visibility of cultural sites and monuments in Uganda.

In 2015, the Uganda National Museum and Wikipedia community in Uganda worked on a photo activation event, which helped develop the Museum's article on Wikipedia. Come September 2018, another WLM Uganda photographic contest will take place and the teams will be up for the challenge.

The winner of the competition stands a chance to win prizes and the top ten photographs from Uganda will be selected for an international finale.

The writer is a member of Wikimedia User Group Uganda and Museum Enthusiasts